

The metaphorical use of the verbs in the non-nominative subject-construction in Assamese

Bisalakshi Sawarni, Dr. Gautam K. Borah
Dept. of Linguistics & Language Technology
Tezpur University
Assam, India
barbiesawarni@gmail.com, gkbtez@gmail.com

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In the current paper, we make an attempt at a study of the metaphorical use of the verbs that are used in the so-called 'non-nominative subject construction' (cf. Subbarao 2012), sometimes called 'the experiential construction' (cf. e.g. Abbi 1990) in Assamese, a South Asian IA language spoken in Assam, the major northeastern province of India. Such a construction (henceforth, NNS Construction) is a characteristic feature of many a South Asian language and the experiencer NP in the construction is marked by either a dative (e.g. Hindi-Urdu, Telegu, Manipuri, Nepali) or a genitive postposition (e.g. Bangla). In some of these languages (e.g. Assamese, Oriya), it may, however, be in the genitive as well as in the dative as can be seen from the following examples from Assamese:

- (a) *mor duk^h lagisil*
moi-r duk^h lag-isil
I-GEN sorrow-ERG be attached-PAST
'I felt sad.'
- (b) *mor piyah lagise*
moi-r piyah lag-is-e
I-GEN thirst-ERG be attached-INGRESSIVE PROG-3
'I'm thirsty.'
- (c) *mok bisar lage*
moi-k bisar lag-e
I-DAT justice-ERG be attached-3
'I want justice.'

As is clear from (a)-(c) above, the NNS Construction in Assamese is used to talk about experiences that are mental/emotional as in (a) above; physical/biological as in (b); and need/requirement as in (c). On the other hand, the verb used in all the three examples is *lag*, the basic meaning of which is 'be attached' as is clear from the (d) below:

- (d) *mor b^harit boka lagil*
moi-r b^hari-t boka lag-il
I-GEN leg-LOC mud-ERG be attached-PERF
'My leg has been soiled.'

Assamese, as we observe in the paper, lacks a verb like the English 'have' and thus the same construction is used to express existence/possession, however, with the verb as meaning 'to exist' in place of *lag* as in (e) below:

- (e) *tomar gari ase*
tumi-r gari as-e
you-GEN car-ERG exist-3
'He has a car.'

From a Cognitive Grammar point of view, the genitive *tomar* 'you-GEN' in (e) is the *reference point* and the situation as expressed by the clause *gari ase* 'a car exists' the *target* (cf. e.g. Taylor 1996; Langacker 1999) in the domain of existence. We argue that this is also true of the examples in (a)-(c) above with

non-exist type predicates: the genitive and the dative subject in them are reference points and the emotion and the need predicates are the targets in the respective domains: *duk^h* 'sorrow', *piyah* 'thirst', respectively in (a), (b), metaphorically, as a reified *thing*, has moved to get attached to the speaker, a human, the result being a genitive marked nominal; in the case of (c), the thing is a need for something, and the nominal is marked by the dative. Thus, (a) can also be said as (f) below, where the locative marked *mor mon* 'my mind' metaphorically means a location:

(f) *mor monat duk^h lagise*
 moi-r mon-at duk^h lag-isil
 I-GEN mon-LOC sorrow- ERG be attached-PAST
 'I felt sad.'

Thus, the NNS Construction can, as we argue in the paper, hardly be explained without recourse to conceptual metaphors and spatial semantics, the role of which is, however, not recognized on a formal syntactic approach. Thus, for example, in the examples using *lag* in (Nath 2013), a generative analysis of the NNS Construction in Assamese, the verb *lag* is glossed as 'feel', which is only an extended metaphorical meaning of the verb.

The paper also discusses the metaphorical use of the verbs other than *lag* as used in the NNS Construction in Assamese: *ut^h* 'rise,' *ho* 'become', and *t^hak* 'stay'.

The primary source of the data used in the paper is the authors themselves, who happen to be native speakers of Assamese.

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